# SWOT - Inputs pre-retreat (June 2015)

# a. The program’s overall strengths and weaknesses

* *Strengths*: focus on systems-based and integrated research (as opposed to a single technology); simultaneous focus on different farming-livestock systems; brings together national and international researchers, active involvement of the donor.
* Strengths: space given to projects to manage and innovate, responsive to emerging issues, collaborative mode of interacting with donor, focus on hot topic (SI), dynamic project design process, continuing dialogues amongst projects
* ***Strengths:*** Farming systems approach to testing, adapting and dissemination of SI options; Trans-regional – covers three mega-sites in Sub-Saharan Africa; Public/private partners and strong institutional capacity that can contribute to change; Increasing interest of governments and donor agencies in intensification – e.g., DFID; Opportunities to link-up to Feed other Future development projects for impact.
* Strengths: “Enforcement” of data capture, archiving and sharing; 2. Learning from each other. Exchange visits are good learning and activity harmonization tools.
* *Strengths:* Flexibility to address emerging R4D issues; Projects management structures; Networking with research and development partners; Annual learning events and M&E meetings
* Strengths: almost all-encompassing research carried out (crops, livestock, soils, water, markets,…), spanning across different agro-ecologies and farming systems; the program provides lots of opportunities for cross-learning
* Weaknesses: we have no clear vision where we want to aim at and not everybody has the same idea; we are not tapping sufficiently the cross learning opportunities; we a e not all fully informed what is going on in which regional project; visibility still to be improved; we have no mechanism to keep the three regional projects together apart from PCT; usefulness of program level meetings like annual learning event, M&E meetings? What is the follow up?
* Weaknesses: alignment with mission priorities and activities could be stronger, semi-detached from FtF, dynamic project design process brings challenges as well as benefits, M and E was not embedded (project design flaw), five years for the kind of impacts envisaged (at a systems level) is insufficient
* *Weaknesses*: too broad program framework to provide practical guidance on what is expected from each project; weak link between quick wins and subsequent research activities (missed opportunity?); misaligned expectations among projects; insufficient level of harmonization within and across projects; unclear feedback mechanisms for sharing experience and how the latter was fed into the design of better research projects; uncertainty about generation of enough empirical evidence on the most promising technologies to help inform the design of next phase as well as scaling up efforts (already happening in some areas)[[1]](#footnote-1); inadequate monitoring through measures and indicators beyond the FtF indicators.
* Weaknesses: Program boundaries are not clearly defined –  there is the temptation to do everything; High transaction cost – in countries where there is limited presence of CGIAR scientists; Initiating the program before developing a program/project document; Focus on technology testing and/adaptation; Monitoring and evaluation component
* *Weaknesses:* Inadequate forums for on science based knowledge sharing; Limited organization of cross-learning visits among projects within the program; Inadequate attention to organize write-shops at program level
* Weaknesses: Weak Follow-up/implementation of some of the meeting outputs, e.g. from Learning Events…; We yet have to make “sustainable” tangible to clearly define where we are heading. We are giving more weight to some aspects of sustainability than others.

# b. Any particular strengths and weaknesses you observed in a specific regional project

* *Strengths:* the continuous strive for attention to process as opposed to other measurable immediate results of the Ethiopia Highlands project; the specific focus of the Malawi project.
* ET Strengths: genuine partnerships across the board, well-focused on real problems and solutions (gives strong farmer engagement), good R4D partnerships with real on the ground involvement from local development partners, emerging findings are genuinely relevant, good targeting initially is starting to pay dividends in terms of spontaneous scaling
* Strengths: Technology testing adaptation – WA; Documentation of project events – ETH; Establishment and facilitation of R4Ds – ETH
* Strengths, Ethiopian highlands project: Farm level and landscape/watershed based research; Strong partnership with CGAR centers, local Universities, research institutions, extension, NGOs, farmers and private entrepreneurs; Placement of site and assistant site coordinators at site level to strengthen linkage and facilitation with local and CGAR centers, and implementation of research initiatives’ on the ground; Establishment of 12 innovation platforms that enhance innovation, communication and cross learning
* Strengths, West, East and Southern Africa Projects: Mother-baby trials; Applied research on water and fertilizers; Communication
* ESA Strengths: 1. Partnerships and collaboration that have grown to appreciate the concept of integration for intensification. We have created enthusiasm and momentum.; 2. Strong bio-physical research; 3. On-farm development of technologies with mother-baby as the preferred approach; 4. Linking with USAID-supported development programs, and gradually with the private sector (notably seed companies) is shaping the researchers views on what can be delivered for adoption (more simple than complicated technologies)
* WA strengths: broad partnerships in Ghana; we have a link with Dryland Systems CRP; we work also in dry areas; strong leadership/control of the research by IITA
* ESA strengths: very broad partnerships; research sub-teams became well-functioning over time; good integration of national programs in TZ; strong capacity building component; we managed to get the USAID mission in TZ interested in our work and providing funds for scaling certain mature technologies; project well visible on our blog and other social media
* ESA weaknesses: sub-teams not well interlinked, working independently; project still weak on social and economic research; livestock research needs to be strengthened; NARS in Malawi not fully involved; we might have overlooked some opportunities provided by already existing projects to build on; no on RO3
* WA weaknesses: only recently we were able to include NARS in the project in Mali; so far too much reliance on NGO’s in Mali, weak collaboration between international partners in the past in Mali; national partners in Ghana sub-performing; we need to drop some; poor presence of partner CGIAR centers in the countries; project still weak in social and economic research to assess viability of technologies; RO3 neglected
* ***Weaknesses:*** Limited on socio-economics aspects – WA; Sub-contracting partners with limited presence in the region increases transaction cost – WA; Limited capacity of some key partners – WA; Trans-regional/project scientists – divided attention and lack of focus – WA and ESA; Livestock and post-harvest component - WA
* Weaknesses: flexible management required to generate the above is exhausting, some inter-disciplinary collaborations could be stronger, relationship with CRPs is ill defined (we ignore them and they ignore us)
* *Weaknesses*: the perhaps too wide aim of the West-Africa project.
* Weaknesses, Ethiopian highlands project: Limited research work on animal health and post-harvest losses; Slow process on establishment of knowledge centers to share the project information to farmers and extension staff members; Limited effort to consolidate various farming systems/ site diagnostic/characterization study findings
* Weaknesses, West, East and Southern Africa Projects: Limited research at landscape/watershed level; Focus on limited commodities for on-farm research
* ESA Weaknesses: 1. Data are generated more at mother than baby sites (testing adaptation and spillovers are important aspects of technology acceptance and are best done at baby sites); 2. Typology-based research has not been adopted; researchers present sets of technologies to all at the demonstration sites and have not yet followed up to determine which typologies chose which technologies; 3. Landscape-based research is still a challenge; more work is at plot level; 4. Socio-economic (value-chain?) research is weak – capacity availability is the limiting factor; 5. R4D/I Platforms – need resources and dedication; 6. Communicating recommendations is weak (scientists shy away from committing to a “completed” technology or “completed component (sequencing)” of the technology. They always have some un-finished business on the technology!

# c.       Your first thoughts on what activities the program (or a specific project) needs to 1) boost or expand, 2) tweak, and 3) stop or transform

* Continue to use the research as the engine for driving innovation but build a layer of scaling partnerships on top of this (we see these emerging already when the research is perceived to be delivering), maintain flexibility in management, M and E: more qualitative needed but now there are opportunities for quantitative activities to generate evidence from our emerging scaling activities (this would need realistic budgeting – the individual projects will not be able to afford it)
* *Activities to boost/expand:* **at the program level**, identify promising discrete technologies to be scaled up in specific areas, to allow for a rigorous impact assessment; **at the IFPRI-project level**, enforceable protocol on data compilation, management and sharing, including data on FtF indicators, project beneficiaries and different (mix of) technologies adopted by beneficiaries.
* *Activities to tweak*: monitoring arrangements. The projected IITA-hired M&E coordinator for WA and ILRI-hired M&E coordinator and CKAN data manager for Ethiopian Highlands (in addition to IFPRI-led web-based project monitoring) could transform and improve monitoring activities, given the multi-country zone of influence and the multi-activity nature of the Program.
* ***Boost or expand – The integrated crop-livestock component needs:*** Integrated crop-livestock component – program; Livestock component – WA and ESA; monitoring and evaluation – needs boosting and transformation – especially WA
* ***Stop or transform:***  Monitoring and evaluation – institutional arrangements and needs to be clearly defined; Scaling and delivery research – needs transformation at the program level!
* ESA and WA: (i) boost: socio-economic research to ensure that technologies are viable for different farm typologies; documentation of technologies that work for different farm types including their associated risks; livestock integration; activities resulting in short-term effects on soil and water; data sharing and joint publications; strengthening of R4D platforms; nutrition related activities; (ii) tweak: all close to maturity technologies to have sound data; RO3: identification and testing of scaling approaches; costed templates for scaling; etc. (iii) stop: more surveys for situation analysis, we have enough data but they need to be made know/accessible;
* Ethiopia: Collaborative and model landscape level research should be boosted; IP initiative should be strengthened; Cross learning visits need to be boosted at program level; Write-shops at program and project level; Science workshops should be there regularly; M&E should be strengthened at project level; R4D action research should be enhanced to bring impacts on the ground; Theory of change concept and approach should be in place
* ESA Boost/Expand: The weaknesses above need to be addressed, but also: 1. Packaging “mature” technologies for delivery and scaling. 2. Ecological measurements – usually at landscape scale – should be strengthened; 3. Reducing product wastage (post-harvest management & value addition) – saves as much as is increased through agronomy. Is this an SI process?; 4. Address marketing as a driver to SI
* ESA Tweak: 1. Rephrase RO3, perhaps to reflect research on on-going approaches (with partner development institutions) to identify and streamline appropriate ones rather than “developing, piloting and testing alternative approaches”.
* ESA Stop: 1. Comprehensive inventory of technologies. In the end, we ought to be coming up with our own inventory of “informed” technologies.

# d.      Any big new insights you have gained since we designed the project that MUST be included into a next proposal.

* In the next proposal, we should probably think of reducing the number of activities in which AR colleagues are involved, to channel the efforts only on the core actions towards sustainable intensification. Moreover, the activities should be self-sufficient to increase the likelihood of a long-lasting action, progressively phasing-out the supply-side intervention. In Phase II more attention needs to be devoted to the expected change in farmers’ behavior triggered by the promising innovations identified and tested in Phase I.
* Capacity building on ‘Integrated Research’ – Avoid putting ‘old-wine in new bottles’!
* Build on experiences/lessons from past projects – do not need to start from the scratch
* Clearly define staff requirements for implementation of regional programs.
* Holistic and system based research at different scale (farm level, landscape and watershed)
* The issue of food, nutrition and income security and NRM
* Some level of scaling of technologies, management practices and approaches from proved best from phase 1
* Indicator logframe; the program’s business plan – indicating pathways to outputs/outcomes common to the program?
* Hypotheses need to be revised. Are we really testing them? Are they testable with reasonable efforts?

# e.     Any observations you have on the functioning/organization/management of the program, what to retain, what to change.

* Strengthen the inter-project interactions (although I think that these are already good and improving, decide whether this is a program or not and, if it is i) allocate a budget for program level activities and ii) provide some program level support (admin but not another management tier)
* The distinction between demand- versus supply-driven interventions/innovations (the later one to generate credible evidence on specific research questions of interest with significant policy implications) should be better articulated and operationalized, to allow a better control over possible options to evaluate. AR staff need to devote additional time and effort to carefully and systematically synthesize findings and results from Phase I to build upon what AR started, to reduce the chances of missed opportunities. In this respect, having an AR **Program Manager** to liaise with the different projects and the donor is recommended (following the CSISA experience).
* The program management group need to plan and regularly visit project sites and research and other activities on the ground
* I am not yet convinced of the added value by the SAG vs. the steering committees? Otherwise, I think things go well.
* I think we have done well…

1. E.g. scale-up appears to have started already in Ethiopian Highlands. Some blog posts appeared where colleague report “promoting” AR innovations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)